



A1 Ott

State Representative • 3rd Assembly District

SB 500

Agricultural Education & Workforce Development Council Senate Committee on Agriculture & Higher Education February 20, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on Senate Bill 500 (SB 500), which creates an Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council.

Agriculture, Wisconsin's largest industry, generates over \$51 billion in annual economic activity. From a single dairy producer in Calumet County to Miller Brewing Company in Milwaukee, our state's economy relies heavily on the success and vitality of our farms and related agribusinesses.

Wisconsin agriculture provides nearly 420,000 jobs, employing 12 percent of the state's workforce. These jobs are diverse – farm owners, on-farm employees, veterinarians, crop and livestock consultants, engineers, feed and fuel suppliers, biochemists, food processors, economists, farm machinery manufacturers, nutritionists, and agricultural lenders, just to name a few. Every new job in agriculture generates an additional 1.3 jobs in Wisconsin.

Unfortunately, industry leaders – employers – are finding it increasingly difficult to obtain enough appropriately trained and skilled workers capable of responding to the industry's wide range of employment needs. Research warns of projected shortfalls in the workforce needed to fuel Wisconsin agriculture.

SB 500 creates a private-public partnership to be known as the Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council within the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. I have been working closely with a group of industry, education and legislative stakeholders since the fall of 2005 to craft the language of the bill before you today.

The goal of the Council is to provide long term advocacy and coordination for agricultural education initiatives that improve the employment opportunities for, and retention of, the well-qualified workforce necessary to meet the changing and challenging demands of Wisconsin's agricultural sector.

The Council will be comprised of industry representatives, education leaders, agency heads, and legislators (a total of 34 members). SB 500 also authorizes one FTE position to serve as the Council's executive director and to facilitate the duties of the Council.

The bill requires the Council to create an executive committee, and allows for the creation of other committees, as needed, to address specific issue areas. Although SB 500 specifies that the State

Superintendent and Secretary of the Department of Agriculture are to be members of the executive committee, the bill further states that the majority of the membership of the executive committee must be non-state employees to ensure that the Council remains industry based and industry focused.

Because coordination is a key element of this initiative, the bill also allows the various state agencies and educational institutions – with members on the Council – to assist the Council in performing its functions. Additionally, SB 500 requires an annual report of the Council's activities and recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature, including termination of the Council if necessary.

This initiative has been almost exclusively industry driven. Agribusinesses in this state firmly believe the Council will help address their workforce needs. They have worked diligently with their industry peers and with educational leaders to shape the legislation and successfully balance the varied interests of the numerous stakeholders in this effort.

As you may know, the Assembly companion to this bill (AB 83) was originally drafted to appropriate up to \$75,000 GPR per year as a matching contribution to privately raised funds. Combined, this money would fund the functions of the Council and pay the salary of the Council's executive director.

In light of the state's budgetary challenges, and knowing that you often have to "put your money where your mouth is," industry is committed to continuing to take the lead in order to make the Council a reality. With the approval of industry stakeholders, AB 83 was amended to remove the GPR appropriation, and SB 500 has been drafted to reflect that change. The industry stakeholders believe so strongly in the need for the Council that they are willing to fund its functions without relying on a state contribution.

SB 500, which incorporates the amendments to AB 83, represents the consensus position of all of the stakeholders in this effort. The Assembly version of the bill was recommended for passage by the Assembly Committee on Education on a 9-1 vote and by the Joint Committee on Finance with a 16-0 vote. Both bills have outstanding bi-partisan co-sponsorship support.

Thank you for your time. I would be happy to take any questions you may have on SB 500.



KATHLEEN VINEHOUT

STATE SENATOR

SB 500/Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council

SB 500, the Senate companion to AB 83 represents what is good about our state. Development of the Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council is a bipartisan initiative that enjoys broad support from legislators, educators, and the agriculture industry. It has been my pleasure to work with Rep. Ott and his office to advance this legislation.

The idea behind the Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council is to bring leaders from diverse agricultural backgrounds to advocate and coordinate agricultural education. Wisconsin's heritage is agriculture and the industry both diverse and expansive: we produce everything from cranberries to bovine genetics. To support such a diverse array of industry, new workers are in great demand. However, we have been approached by industry leaders who are having a very difficult time finding appropriately educated workers, whether that is a veterinarian, a geneticist, a crop consultant, or an economist.

I believe that the Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council will help solve this situation. It brings together a range of people to solve this problem. The goal of the council is to provide long term advocacy and coordination of agricultural education in order to better prepare Wisconsin's students to meet the diverse challenges of our agricultural industry.

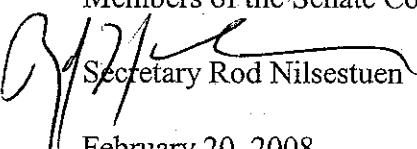
The groups supporting this bill believe strongly in this bill. When the state's financial situation worsened and threatened this bill's passage, supporters rallied together and pledged to take on the entire fiscal burden. SB 500 is a good bill: it solves a problem in a bipartisan manner and it does not have a fiscal impact. I would like to thank Rep. Ott, Al Herrman, Dick Meske, and others for their hard work on this initiative.



CORRESPONDENCE/MEMORANDUM

Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Office of the Secretary

TO: Senator Kathleen Vinehout, Chair
Members of the Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education

FROM:  Secretary Rod Nilsestuen

DATE: February 20, 2008

RE: Support of SB 500

I am pleased to join a broad range of Wisconsin agricultural interest in support of Senate Bill 500---the establishment of a Wisconsin Agriculture Education and Workforce Development Council.

Soon after being appointed Secretary of DATCP I realized that if we were to grow the Wisconsin agricultural economy we needed a consistent source of competent workers---from the labor force on our farms and in our plants, to the business owners and managers, and the researchers in our laboratories. Too many rural communities are witnessing the outward migration of potential workers.

Upon the urging of both industry operatives and educators I appointed a task force to identify the needs of the sector and provide recommendations that, if enacted, gives greater assurance to investors they would have a qualified human resource pool to draw upon. The proposal before you is a result of those deliberations. I want to take this opportunity to thank and congratulate the industry leaders who have shown tremendous resolve in designing and advancing this legislation. It has been a wonderful display of citizens recognizing a need and working in behalf of a greater economic and social good.

Currently few industries are experiencing the rapidity of change being witnessed in agriculture. Not since Wisconsin moved from growing wheat to dairying has there been such profound transitioning. While some operations are investing in size and technology, others are successfully carving out production and marketing niches.

In addition, the exploding renewable energy industry calls for new land management systems, and considerable research to create more efficiencies and products from the extruding process.

Many producers and processors now rank the sourcing of a quality labor force above the securing of capital and management expertise as an expansion consideration. Many simply could not operate without immigrant labor. These people must be integrated into our educational systems.

It would be my hope that the establishment of this council will:

---Serve to monitor the state's agriculture and natural resource labor needs and when appropriate become advocates for change.

---Help insure that we have a seamless system of offerings from K through 12 through the technical and University programming.

---Help design and support continuing educational programming that will make Wisconsin a preferred location for the establishment and/or expansion of agricultural commerce.

Establishment of the Council and funding for an executive director at DATCP will give us another resource in our quest to further expand the \$51 Billion agricultural industry.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal.



Wisconsin Federation of Cooperatives

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2/20/2008

To: Members, Senate Committee on Agriculture and Higher Education
From: John Manske, Director of Government Relations
RE: Support for SB 500

WFC represents 600 cooperatives, mutual insurance companies and credit unions that employ approximately 20,000 people. We ask for your support of Senate Bill 500, which will create an Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council in DATCP. Approximately 30-40% of the employees of our member cooperatives will be eligible to retire in the next 10 years. Replacing these experienced and skilled employees with qualified individuals will be a necessity for our members and is a concern to us as well. It is essential that a pool of highly trained and skilled workers be available in order for Wisconsin employers to be able to continue to succeed in a competitive marketplace.

The Wisconsin Agricultural Education and Workforce Development Council created through SB 500 will be the convening mechanism for legislators, agricultural organization representatives, educational institutions and state agency representatives to assess the state of agricultural education programs at all levels – K-12, university and the technical colleges. While the size of the council was increased during deliberations on the companion bill (AB 83) to provide more stakeholders a seat at the table, an executive committee will likely be the real “workhorse” as it will meet between council meetings while the council is required to meet at least annually. The council and executive committee will be essential to the development, coordination and evaluation of agricultural, industry, food and natural resource education programs within and among various public education institutions. They will also help mobilize new resources – dollars and people for programs where needs have been identified. The council will serve first and foremost as an advocate for agricultural education!

The authorization of the council executive director position at the Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection is a critical part of this initiative. The agricultural business community believes that it is necessary to have a strong agricultural education liaison at DATCP to work with educators, industry and the public. The executive director position is a program revenue funded position by way of gifts and grants.

Wisconsin needs to do everything it can to keep its agricultural industry strong and growing. Much has been accomplished in recent legislative sessions due to the strong partnership between agricultural organizations and state government. With the agricultural sector, educators and state government all working together in a focused and strengthened effort, we will help ensure a well trained workforce for our state's largest industry and a brighter future for Wisconsin.

Thank you for considering this request.

